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His Story: **Gambling addiction forces engineer to face his own troubled past**



RANDY'S FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT OF HIS STORY

How did I become someone who I didn't want to be? I lied, cheated, stole, dismissed those who loved or cared about me, distrusted everyone, acquired self-hatred, and eventually attempted a suicide? Why were my expectations of myself so much higher than others, which led me to be able to accept others but not myself? Why was it, I considered myself a failure when compared to others? Why couldn't I let God forgive me? Why couldn't I be normal? Why couldn't I be responsible and stop gambling and drinking? Why . . . why . . . why? I wasn't always this way . . . or was I?

I grew up in a small Midwestern town in Minnesota, although born and adopted in California. I was the oldest of four siblings and I continuously heard that I should be "responsible". Many things in occurred in my childhood that I thought I was responsible for. At age four I had to give up my closest friend, my dog "Teddy". I thought I was responsible for giving my best friend away. During my early childhood I incurred several severe injuries and illnesses. I felt responsible for my parent's medical debts. My parents forced me to attend a church where God was portrayed as a vengeful god. God would have "bad" things happened to me because of my bad behavior, therefore I was responsible for the outcomes. At age 11, my fourth grade male teacher molested me. He was allowed to continue teaching even though he admitted it. It must have been something about me. At age 12, I was molested by a man with the carnival troupe that was in town. At age 16, I got caught stealing \$20 from a clothing store I worked at. This was the first time that I felt so embarrassed and shameful that I considered suicide. I had let everyone down . . . I felt like I was responsible for everyone else's feelings and that I was an embarrassment to them. Also, at age 16, I found out that I had been adopted. It re-affirmed to me that I indeed was different. Had it not been for a girlfriend at the time, I probably would have ended my life. She became pregnant the next year and we got married out of state. I was age 17.

At age 17, after getting married, I joined the Navy to support my family and to avoid going to Vietnam. During my eight years in the military, I enjoyed playing poker with the guys but didn't really have the monetary resources to play long. I also experimented with pills and alcohol during this period, usually just for social pleasure or to stay awake.

At age 25 I re-entered the civilian world and soon found a job to support my wife and three children. During the day I worked as a technician for a manufacturing company and began taking evening classes for a degree at a state university. After ten years, I finally received a BS Chemical Engineering degree. Not exactly the field I wanted to go into but then the money and opportunities were greater. At age 38, I began to recognize that my life wasn't how I expected it to be. I had grown distant from my wife as we had gone different pathways with our children and community involvement. We attempted to work it out but the struggle was futile. At age 39, the company decided to close its business. My wife and I decided to divorce. Again, I thought "I" was responsible. I should've known how to prevent all of this from occurring.

My work friends, tried to cheer me up by inviting me out for drinks after work. It was fun while they were there. They would leave and I would stay. Soon we began dabbling in pulltabs (paper slots). It was fun at first but after a year or so it became a habit. My expenses were exceeding my income and my drinking had accelerated. I had many relationships during this time as well, and at one point I thought I was addicted to them as well. They provided value to me as I thought I was providing value to them. I envisioned my self as a self-proclaimed counselor at the bars. I often prayed that I would never wake up again. After a couple of years of making attempts to limit my alcohol and failing, I entered an out-patient alcohol treatment program. When I got to the fourth step and began to really look at my character defects, I found that I was really sicker than I thought I already was. I thought this was really who I was. This was devastating to me and it became my excuse to continue to gamble. I quit drinking for a year and a half, but the gambling continued. In 1992, I went to my first GA meeting. Unbeknownst to me, it was a speaker meeting. I listened to this lady divulge her whole life story and describe all of her losses (financial, emotional, spiritual and family). I recall thinking . . . "thank God I'm not that bad!" I continued to go to two GA meetings a week for over six months and during that time I didn't gamble. After that time period, I thought that I must now be able to control my gambling and drinking. I stayed away from pulltabs and began going to casinos which were an hour drive away. I thought the distance would limit my frequency (and my losses). During all this time I had sought help for depression at a community counseling facility. I became adept at changing the issues on a weekly basis so as to

keep the counselor from recognizing my gambling addiction. In 2004, I felt there was no hope left. I couldn't stop gambling. To cope with the gambling, I would drink enough so as to not think about the lies and financial losses. Three days later I would think to myself . . . "it wasn't that bad!", and then go repeat the process. The merry-go-round was spinning way too fast at this point and I knew eventually it would fly apart. On leap year day, 2004, I attempted to end my life . . . my final attempt to control my gambling . . . or so I thought. Within one month following my four day stay in a mental health hospital, I was planning my next gambling outing. I gambled one more time before seeking help.

At the advice of an EAP counselor at work, I sought help from a well known addiction counselor, Craig Nakken in St. Paul, Minnesota. As I identified strongly with his book (Addictive Personalities) I was willing to take his suggestion to enter an in-patient treatment program for compulsive gambling offered at Project Turnabout in Granite Falls, Minnesota. I cannot say enough as to how much this program helped me to recognize and let go of the past, as well as to teach me how to use the tools of recovery offered there. It has been and continues to be an amazing journey as I continue to get my life back. More amazing to me was how much my life began to change when I gave up my God job. "I began to change the way I looked at things and the things I looked at changed"; (Dr. Wayne Dyer, The Power of Intention). I am becoming the person I've always wanted to be through the help of my friends in GA, Vanguard and my Higher Power.

Disclaimer: the above story appears in its original form and has not been edited for content. The above story does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of The National Council on Problem Gambling.